



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

5th Sunday of Easter | Year C



Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1308-1311. Christ teaching the Apostles at the Last Supper.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

God of mercy,

You wash away our sins in water,

You give us new birth in the Spirit,

And redeem us in the blood of Christ.

As we celebrate Christ's resurrection

Increase our awareness of these blessings,

And renew your gift of life within us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God forever and ever.

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, ICEL, Catholic Book, New York, 452]

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection. Today's liturgy focuses on perseverance, steadfast love and endurance for the sake of the Gospel, knowing that we are saved both now and in the world to come.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Acts of the Apostles 14:21-27

- ▶ Paul continues on his missionary journey. He preaches the Gospel, he establishes communities. He is rejected for his missionary activity and is persecuted. Such is the life of this itinerant preacher.
- ▶ Regardless of all that he endures, Paul continues to do the work he was appointed by God to accomplish.
- ▶ The ordination scene in today's reading is a reminder that Paul's work flows from the ministry of the original Twelve Apostles.
- ▶ Luke's intention in Acts is to illustrate through the super deeds of Paul and company that he is equal to Peter.
- ▶ Paul is a prime example of the long-suffering servant who perseveres and endures persecution for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ Paul returns to the churches he had earlier established for the purpose of strengthening them and encouraging them to persevere in the face of adversity.
- ▶ He reminds them that even though they as yet had not experienced much persecution, it does go hand in hand with living and preaching the Gospel. Paul is a prime example of that truth.
- ▶ Suffering goes hand in hand with participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Jesus himself understood his suffering in the same way prophets understood suffering—a necessary path. Suffering is the gateway to salvation.
- ▶ Paul wishes to express that God is one who has called him into ministry and ordained his work. He goes forth under God's initiative—not his own.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ What does Paul have to teach us about the mystery of suffering?
- ▶ How can suffering be a good thing?
- ▶ What did suffering accomplish in Paul’s life?
- ▶ What does it accomplish in our lives today?
- ▶ What have you learned from the suffering in your life?
- ▶ What does “no pain, no gain” mean to you?
- ▶ What does it say to you about God that pain is necessary for growth?

Second Reading: Revelation 21: 1-5a

- ▶ Today’s reading focuses on redemption. The new heaven and earth spring forth because the old has passed away.
- ▶ The sea has mythological roots in the Old Testament. It connotes the flood and the waters of sin inherent in the flood.
- ▶ The *sea that was no more* is a reference to the eradication of sin and God’s victory over sin and death.
- ▶ The restoration John speaks of in this reading is an after-life reality. It is gone in the present. The new Jerusalem is a future hope to be realized with God for all eternity.
- ▶ The wiping away of tears and quenching thirst are signs of salvation—people who are saved will know complete wholeness.
- ▶ The new things spoken of in this text is a reference to the new life Christ established by his death and resurrection. Thus, this has already been fulfilled in and through Christ. It is considered realized eschatology—we are saved both now and not yet. We are saved now, in this world, and in the world yet to come.
- ▶ We experience this salvation in the sacramental life of the Church—the presence of Christ in and through the sacraments. Yet we will not fully experience it until we die and are taken up into the arms of God for all eternity.
- ▶ Tears will only be wiped away at the end of the world; until then there will be joy but it will stand alongside suffering.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What does the image of the new heaven and new earth mean to you?
- ▶ Describe the new heaven and new earth you would like to live in.
- ▶ Do you think it is possible to experience the new heaven and new earth here in this time and place?
- ▶ What are the implications of the new heaven and new earth? What do these images do for us?
- ▶ Where is the good news?

Gospel: John 10:27-30

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Christ is the realization, the incarnation of God’s love.
- ▶ Love is synonymous with Jesus according to John.
- ▶ Jesus showed us perfect love by offering his life on the cross.
- ▶ We are all called to lay down our lives for one another in the same self-sacrificing way Christ laid down his life for us.
- ▶ This command to love is so simple. We are all called to love with a self-effacing, self-sacrificing love. Jesus died on the cross for the sake of our sins. We too are called to die for the sake of ongoing redemption of the world.
- ▶ John tells us that Judas left—he leaves to betray Jesus. Yet what does Jesus do? He commands his friends to love one another.
- ▶ Jesus insists that the Son of Man is glorified—he knows the outcome; he is in control of his own destiny. He is the divine Christ orchestrating the events of salvation.
- ▶ The Jewish concept of love was only extended to their own kind.
- ▶ Jesus’ command takes love a step further. He insists that love is to be extended to everyone—it is the hallmark of the new covenant he forged with his followers.
- ▶ Jesus’ legacy in the face of pending torture and death is to leave a legacy of love. They will know Christ by the love his followers have for one another.

- ▶ Jesus gives the example of the kind of love to which he is referring—a self-sacrificing love manifest on Christ’s own death on the cross.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ Has anyone ever loved you with a self-sacrificing sort of love? What did that teach you about the love to which Jesus is referring in this Gospel?
- ▶ Have you ever tried to love in a similar way? What are the obstacles?
- ▶ What does love mean to you? How does our culture understand love? How does the Gospel speak to what our culture understands about love?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today’s liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God’s call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. Many years ago my husband and I belonged to a small Christian community. We called ourselves the community of the cross. We meditated upon the Paschal Mystery of Christ, knowing that our ministry would be as effective as our willingness to embrace the suffering in our lives and join it to the cross of Christ for the sake of ongoing redemption in the world.

Thirty years later as I look back on those days and as I contemplate on my life I see profound truth in the principles we set forth. The extent to which I/we have been willing to embrace and enter into the suffering in our lives is the extent to which ministry has been effective. God uses our humble offering of suffering to continue his work of transformation. I find deep spiritual meaning for my life in that truth. At least the suffering in life has meaning and purpose.

#2. My family recently had celebrated a significant birthday in my life. They secretly flew my best friend in the world to come and celebrate with my family and we had a small gathering of close friends and family. It was the most joyous event I can remember in a long time. We laughed, we cried, we celebrated life, we celebrated struggle. We shared stories of deepest joy and stories of deepest anguish—those stories are what we call the tapestry of our lives. I would no more give up the struggles than I would give up the joy as it is all a part of who and what makes me what I am today.

It is an amazing paradox that joy and sorrow can be intimate bedfellows and be precious companions on life's journey. Tears will not end until life is over. But God's saving power continues in the here and now. We are assured that God goes with us no matter what we face. God is with us in the laughter and in the tears. St. Paul calls that "life as participation". When we fully participate in the life of Christ within, we live life to the fullest—no matter what life dishes out. I cannot imagine enduring the struggles of this life without faith. How barren and hollow it would be.

3. I remember a time when I was treasured beyond imagining by my husband. I have experienced a true, self-sacrificing love by my husband. We had just experienced a heart-wrenching, ugly family situation. It required a response on my part. It was an ugly job and I stood paralyzed in the face of it. My husband took the burden from my shoulders. He shouldered the burden for me. He took it upon himself and simply let me grieve over the situation. I have never loved him more than I loved him at that moment. It was a true sacrifice and a true labor of love. I can only hope to reciprocate in kind at some point in my life. He is an example to me of self-sacrificing love. I was forever changed in that moment.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Sacraments
Sacrament of Baptism
Salvation
Symbols of Bread and Wine
Evangelization

Church
Liturgical Year
Revelation I or II
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SACRAMENTS

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the way in which Jesus continues his saving mission in the midst of his absence. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

We are saved by God's love [Gospel] and we are saved by God's presence to us through the joys and the sorrows of our lives. The vehicle for that saving grace is Baptism. Easter season is a good time to reflect on the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, the sacraments of initiation—the sacraments that make present the paschal mystery of Christ. Thus today we will focus our attention on BAPTISM.

SALVATION

Easter is a time we meditate upon the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation accomplished through the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Jesus' leaves us his ongoing plan of salvation in his command to love in today's Gospel. Thus, today we will focus on the doctrinal teaching regarding SALVATION.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit to which we are given access in the liturgy. We experience the paschal mystery of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the Eucharistic cup. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on the SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE—the symbols of the Eucharist.

EVANGELIZATION

The readings about the escapades of Paul throughout the Easter season are a reminder that we are all called to go out and spread the Good News. The Church teaches us what we need to know about this very worthy enterprise. Today's session will focus on EVANGELIZATION.

CHURCH

The ordination liturgy in the second reading is a reminder that Paul's work was built on the foundation of the Twelve Apostles. Throughout the Easter season the Acts of the Apostles relates the story of the development of the fledgling Church. It logically follows that today's liturgy invites further reflection on the CHURCH. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of CHURCH and its STRUCTURE.

LITURGICAL YEAR

The liturgical year sets forth in liturgy God's plan of salvation in and through Christ. This is the Easter season, the season par excellence in which the Paschal Mystery of Christ is proclaimed and made manifest in the liturgical cycle. Today we are going to devote our attention to the mystery of salvation as it comes to us in the LITURGICAL YEAR.

REVELATION Part I or II

What better time is there than Easter season to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? The second reading particularly focuses on God's revelation. Today's session will focus on God's revelation.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.